

Maricopa County Supervisor Andy Kunasek, District 3

Every weekend I leave my suit and tie in the closet and pull on my jeans for hiking, boating or camping with my family. Though we do travel to favorite out-of-town outdoor destinations, we often choose to enjoy one of the ten, local Maricopa County parks. The Maricopa County Regional Park System is the largest regional park system in the United States boasting 120,000 acres around the county.

Though each of the parks is within an hour's drive from downtown Phoenix, the locations closest to the Tatum Sun Times circulation area are Spur Cross Ranch Conservation Area, Cave Creek Regional Park and McDowell Regional Park, all lining the East end of Maricopa County from the farthest North point to the Fountain Hills area. Lake Pleasant to the Northwest also attracts many folks from the North part of the county.

The northernmost park, Spur Cross Ranch Conservation Area, is the newest addition to the park system with archeology sites and lush riparian areas along Cave Creek, which flows through the winter months. Remnants of early ranching, from which the park gets its name, are still apparent in the park. Also North of Phoenix is Cave Creek Regional Park where gold seekers staked their claims in the 1870's. Hikers and equestrians can strike it rich with majestic views and the illusion of being miles away from civilization. At McDowell Mountain Regional Park, visitors can enjoy a full program of events and over fifty miles of multiuse trails, while at Lake Pleasant Regional Park, there is boating, fishing and swimming in addition to camping, hiking, picnicking and wildlife viewing.

All the parks provide activities year-round, though February through April seems to be when visitors use the parks most heavily. Anyone is welcome to explore the designated trails on his own, but there also are planned activities visitors can enjoy. In March, there will be stargazing at Spur Cross Ranch Conservation Area while at Cave Creek Regional Park, there is a moonlight hike as well as a *Venomous Creatures of the Desert* live animal presentation. Also in March, the Competitive Track at McDowell Mountain Regional Park will host the Desert Nova Classic mountain bike race, which attracts national attention.

Guided archeological hikes, fitness hikes, bring-your-dog-hikes are scheduled at the various parks, as well as fun, educational activities for kids. Please visit the Maricopa County Parks and Recreation website: www.maricopa.gov/parks for information about each park, including directions, fees and scheduled activities.



